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Conforming to God's Holiness
19: 19-37

Conforming to God's holiness DIG: Of all these mitzvot, which seem to apply universally, to all people, and which seem to have their application limited to the ancient Israelites? How do you make the distinction? Who is your neighbor and how should you act towards him or her?

REFLECT: In your own life, how has God delivered you from some sin mentioned here? How does deliverance help you live better with your God? Do you see tattoos today as being reflective of a pagan culture? Why? Why not? How do you honor your body as a temple?

We follow these commandments not to gain our salvation, but as our blueprint for living.

The emphasis now shifts to focus on the proper distinctions that **the covenant people** should make. **They** had to follow **YHVH**, the **God** of creation **(Genesis 1:1)**. And because **He** made divisions in all of creation – light from dark, land from sea, day from night, animals from humans, men from women – **they** had to follow the same principles in **their** lives.

Observe my statutes (19:19a). Of the many occurrences of the word **statutes** (Hebrew: *hachukkim*, meaning *to write into law permanently*) in **Leviticus**, there is a constant pattern of applying **it** specifically to mitzvot that concern religious matters. For this reason, the term refers only to the three indented **statutes** below.

> **Crossbreeding: The Israelites** learned from these **statutes** to keep separate what **YHVH** had divided. **Don't let your livestock mate with those of another kind, don't sow your field with two different kinds of grain (Genesis 1:11-12), and don't wear a garment of cloth made with two different kinds of thread (19:19b).** These **statutes** are parallel with the ones in **Deuteronomy 22:9-11**, which forbid sowing of different seeds together and wearing cloth made out of wool and linen. These **statutes** for

Isra'el's daily life were not retained in the B'rit Chadashah. Like the regulations for diet and ritual purification, these **statutes** were temporary, but they reveal eternal truths. The principles of separation, order in creation, and purity in life all emerge in the New Covenant to guide the believer in the way to live.[333]

The betrothed maidservant: In another improper mixture: **If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave betrothed to another man, and she has neither been redeemed nor given her freedom, there is to be an investigation.** Since **betrothal** carries the status of full marriage in **the Torah**, this would ordinarily be construed to be adultery. And adultery meant the death sentence for both the adulterer and the adulteress. However, in this case, the **betrothed woman** was not a free agent, **she** was **a slave**, not yet **redeemed**, or **set free** to be married. In that case, the act was not considered tantamount to adultery, but simply a violation of her would be to her husband's rights. **They are not to be put to death, because she was not free.**

It would appear that **the Torah** intends to protect **the enslaved woman**. In all likelihood, a **slave woman** be **betrothed** to be married without **her** consent. No one consulted **her** about the decision. Therefore, **she** would not be treated as an adulteress if **she** violated **her** marriage prior to its consummation. Were she to do so after the marriage was consummated, then it would certainly be considered adultery. So, too, if she had freely willingly consented to the marriage. This was the problem **Mary** faced when **she** found out that she was pregnant (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Al – The Birth of Jesus Foretold to Mary**).

Instead of a death sentence, the couple was to be punished and the man was required to bring **a guilt offering** (see **Am – The Guilt Offering: Evidence of Repentance**) for the offense of misusing that which lawfully belonged to another. The exact nature of the punishment is not specified. **In reparation he is to bring a ram as a guilt offering for himself to the entrance of the tent of meeting. The priest will make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before ADONAI for the sin he committed, and he will be forgiven for the sin he committed (19:20-22).** The point of the mitzvah is that the couple was not to be put to death for an indiscretion that happened outside of marriage and proper **betrothal**. This mitzvah doesn't tell us how the story ends. Hopefully, the offending couple went on to be married

and lived happily ever after.

The mitzvah of the fruit trees: **Holy people**, called to sanctify and redeem the Land, must obey **YHVH** by not eating **fruit** from **a forbidden tree**. Firstfruits of a newly planted tree are considered unfit and must not be eaten for the first three years. **This fruit is referred to as *orlah,* literally, *uncircumcised,* unfit like a foreskin. When you enter the land and plant various kinds of fruit trees, you are to regard its fruit is forbidden – for three years it will be forbidden to you and not eaten. In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, for praising ADONAI. Considered a second tithe, all the fruit is picked and carried up to Jerusalem, and eaten before God amidst praise and thanksgiving. But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, so that it will produce even more for you.** Practicing the mitzvah of ***orlah*** weans people away from selfishness. By devoting **the fruit** exclusively to **God's praise** and service, one learns the lessons of prosperity. In this way, the creation is redeemed. Obeying **Torah** redeems eating **fruit** from **the forbidden tree**! The motivation for keeping this mitzvah is expressed by: **I am ADONAI your God (19:23-25).**[334] The **holiness** of **the Israelites** needed to stand in stark contrast to the lifestyle of the idolatrous Gentile nations which would surround their nation. **Leviticus 19:26-28**, therefore, gave specific instructions which had to do with certain Canaanite practices.

Blood: Do not eat anything with blood (19:26a). This is the fourth time Leviticus commands not to **eat meat** with the **blood** still in **it (3:17, 7:26-27,** and **17:10-14)**. This basic prohibition of **eating blood** is found in the Noahic Covenant (see the commentary on **Genesis Cz – Whoever Sheds Human Blood, by Humans Shall Their Blood Be Shed**), but the expression here is literally, *to eat upon the blood.* The verb *to eat* with this idiom occurs only in three other places: **First Samuel 14:32-33** and **Ezeki'el 33:25**. The first two describe a condemned practice by **Sha'ul's** warriors, who were famished after a successful battle and ate the enemy's livestock after butchering them on the ground without a stone or platform that could drain **the blood**. The **Ezeki'el** context, however, associate's idolatry with this practice; therefore, there is more involved than the prohibition of **eating meat** with **blood** in **it**.[335] The Jerusalem Counsel's letter to Gentile believers said **that** they should **abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. By keeping away from these things, you will do well. Shalom (15:27-29)!**

Witchcraft: Do not practice divination or fortune-telling (19:26b). We know **ADONAI's** feelings about this (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Dj – God Hates Sorcery**), but humans have always been naturally curious about the future, wondering whether blessings or dangers possibly await them. In the pagan world of the ancient Near East many believed that insight into the future was possible through divination and sorcery. This was especially true in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Techniques involved inspection of water in a goblet or water basin **(Genesis 44:4)**, the use of arrows **(Ezeki'el 21:26; Hosea 4:12)**, or dreams **(First Samuel 28:6; Genesis 37:5-11** and **41:1-36)**. **The Israelites** had access to information about future events only if **God** chose to reveal it to them. Thus, revelation was diametrically opposed to divination.[336]

Haircuts and beards: Don't round your hair at the temples or mar the edges of your beard (19:27). Among the ancients the hair was often used in divination. The worshipers of the stars and planets cut their hair evenly round, trimming the extremities.[337] Today, observant Jews follow this mitzvah. However, **Ha'Shem** still wants us, as **His** representatives today, to look different. If we appear modest in our skin, hair and clothing, we will certainly be different, set apart for **holiness**.



Tattoos: The Torah expressly forbids **cutting one's flesh** or getting **tattoos**. The text from **Leviticus 21:5** is specifically speaking to **the priests** who served **ADONAI** in the Tabernacle. **Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies.** However, here, the text from **Leviticus 19:28** is speaking for all **the people of Isra'el, "Don't cut gashes in your flesh for the dead** (Hebrew: *nephesh*)**."** In **Elijah's** contest with **the** cult

prophets of Ba'al (First Kings 18), **the pagan priests** gashed themselves as they called upon **Ba'al** to answer their prayers. The Hebrew word *nephesh* may connote a dead body as well as a living person. **"Or tattoo yourselves; I am ADONAI" (19:28).** The custom of **cutting** the arms, hands, and face as tokens of mourning for the dead is said to have existed among the Babylonians, Syrians, Romans, and practiced by the Arabs of the present day. It was sometimes accompanied by shaving off the hair from the head.

The Orientals were very fond of **tattooing**. Figures of birds, trees, flowers, temples, and gods were carefully and painfully marked in their flesh with colors by the puncturing of sharp needles. This is still done in India for idolatrous purposes, and, in Moshe's day, probably had some connection with idolatry.[338] Though **tattoos** have become enormously popular, **they** are not for **God's holy people**. We are different from the rest of **the world (James 1:27; First John 2:15-17).** We are to act differently; we are married differently; we are to work differently; live differently, and *look* differently. This prohibition against **tattoos** is not a matter of legalism, but a matter of **holiness**.

Temple Prostitution: These verses contain contrasting commands. **Verse 29** prohibited **the Israelites** from a temptation they faced because of poverty or greed: **Do not debase** (Hebrew: *chol,* meaning *profaneness* or *commonness*) **your daughter by making her a prostitute.** To do so was to **debase her**, the same word used in **19:8** to describe **profaning** that which is **holy**. Like every **Israelite, daughters** were part of **ADONAI's holy people**, and needed to be treated as such. **They** were not to be treated like *a common thing* that anyone could use. To do so was not only to disregard **their holy** status but also to set a pattern many others would follow. The entire **Land** would quickly be infected with that degrading and wicked behavior. **So that the Land will not fall into prostitution and become full of shame.** The obvious result would be **the LORD's** judgment.[339]

Pornography is a modern-day form of prostitution. As a holy people we are to be different from the culture around us. We are not to be feasting our eyes on the unclean lewdness of the pagan world or tantalizing our flesh with their lewdness. **What has light to do with darkness** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bi – Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**)**? David** counsels us: **I will not allow before my eyes any shameful thing. I hate those who act crookedly; what they do does not attract me (Psalm 101:3).**

Instead, **the Land** was to be filled with those who embraced the **covenant** from

the heart. **Keep my Shabbats, and revere my Sanctuary; I am ADONAI (19:29-30). The Sabbath's** are **God's** appointed times (see **Dw – God's Appointed Times**), and **the Temple** is **God's** appointed place. A proper reverence for **God's Holy House** – **the Temple** – will help us attain a proper reverence for **the people of God**, **the body of Messiah** and the eternal, heavenly **Sanctuary** – all of which are represented by **the** earthly **temple**. **Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Ruach Ha'Kodesh, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies (First Cor 6:19-20).**[340]

The occult: **The Israelites** were prohibited from consulting with the dead. **Do not turn to spirit-mediums or sorcerers; don't seek them out, to be defiled by them. Isaiah 19:3** and **Deuteronomy 18:11** explicitly associate these terms with consultation with dead **spirits**. The terms for spirit-mediums and sorcerers occur together in similar prohibitions in Leviticus. And **Leviticus 20:27** demands the **death** penalty for any who practice the occult. **Manasseh** is condemned for **his** consultation with **them (Second Kings 21:6; Second Chronicles 33:6)**, and **King Sha'ul** had **Samuel** brought up (see the commentary on **The Life of David Bv – Sha'ul and the Medium at Endor**). **Josiah**, on the other hand, attempted to rid **the Land** of **them (Second Kings 23:24)**. Again, the expression **I am ADONAI your God** is nestled in among these verses **(19:31).**[341]

Rising before the elderly: The commandment to **stand up in the presence of a person with gray hair,** and to **show respect for the old** is tied to **the fear of ADONAI,** which is **the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10a).** When we respect **the elderly**, it is credited to us as reverence for **YHVH**. If we are unable to honor our seniors, neither will we find reverence for **God** within us. Imagine a culture where the young people stood up from their chairs when **the elderly** entered the room. Imagine a culture where, rather than brazen disrespect for seniors, honor and admiration were accorded them on account of their years of wisdom. Such is **the Torah** culture. We are to be a holy people. We are to be different. Again, the motivation for obeying this mitzvah is stated: **I am ADONAI (19:32).**

Love the foreigner: It is not only a mitzvah to **love your neighbor as yourself** (see **Di – Love Your Neighbor as Yourself**), it was a mitzvah to **love the foreigner as yourself**. **If a foreigner/stranger stays with you in your Land, do not do him wrong. Rather, treat the foreigner staying with you like the native-born among you – you are to love him as yourself, for you were**

foreigners in the land of Egypt. The Israelites were strangers **in Egypt**, so **they** were to be sensitive and compassionate to **the foreigners** who lived among **them**. Thus, **the Jews** were commanded to **love the Gentiles** among **them**. These are the brothers and sisters from the nations that have chosen **the Messiah** of **Isra'el** and **the Torah** of **Isra'el** as a matter of choice rather than family heritage. **God** has a special **love** for such **foreigners** who have sacrificed **their** former ways of life in order to follow **His Son** and keep **His commandments** (see the commentary on **Ruth An – Your People Will Be My People and Your God My God**). Therefore, **He** tells **the Israelites** to **love the foreigner**. Once again, **God** forcefully states: **I am ADONAI your God (19:33-34).**

On the other hand, **the foreigner** could be anyone. This explains **the Master's** broadening of **Leviticus 19:18, love your neighbor as yourself.** When asked: **Who is my neighbor, Yeshua** pointed to "the stranger" in a parable (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gw – The Parable of the Good Samaritan**). It was not just one's fellow **Jew** to whom **love** must be shown, but also to **the strangers**. We are therefore responsible to demonstrate an attitude of **love** to all mankind.

This is an important mitzvah of **holiness**, perhaps one of the most important. We are markedly different from the rest of the world by our attitudes of **love**. As Torah-faithful disciples of Messiah, we must excel in this area. We will constantly encounter situations that demand a demonstration of **love** for **strangers**, for we have been estranged from the entire world. As we share the gospel of **Messiah** and goodness of **His** grace, we must do so with **love**. As we communicate **the Torah** as our blueprint for living, we must do so with **love**. We must hold tightly to our high standards of **holiness** without passing judgment upon those who do not. We must show acceptance while demonstrating righteousness. **For the mitzvah, "Don't commit adultery," "Don't murder," "Don't steal," "Don't covet," and any others are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does not do harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fullness of Torah (Romans 13:9-10).**

Love does no harm to the stranger, but we must also remember that **the stranger** shouldn't do any **harm** to us. When people travel to a foreign land for better financial opportunities or to flee oppression that is one thing. But today, many **strangers** are coming into your country to sell drugs to your children, to rape your daughters and to murder you and your neighbors. In that case, to protect your country, your neighborhood, your family and yourself, you must not allow **them** to

stay. It is not **loving** to fail to protect the vulnerable.

Righteous weights and measures: The mitzvot of **the Torah** are very much concerned with righteous weights and measures. **Don't be dishonest when measuring length, weight or capacity. Rather, use an honest balance-scale, honest weights, an honest bushel dry-measure and an honest gallon liquid-measure; I am ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (19:35-36). Jewish observance of these mitzvot is demanding. The surface of scales are frequently cleansed off less an accumulation of dust or grime tip the scale. Scales and measures are checked and double-checked against a common standard.**

In terms of modern application, the commandment is considerably more complicated. We must be scrupulously honest in our business affairs. Prices, discounts, sales, advertising claims and so on must be carefully measured and accurately represented. **Holiness** demands integrity, and the high level of integrity mandated by the Torah will make you **holy**. A person who figuratively wipes the dust from his scale will stand out as different from the rest of **the world**. Everyone else in the world is trying to cheat you. Their main concern in business is to make as much money as possible. A disciple of **Messiah's** main concern is that he is not cheating you. He is happier taking a loss than wondering if he might have inadvertently cheated a person.

The demand for righteous **weights and measures** is a demand for a fair and equitable standard of measure. This is a principle which must be extended into every area of our life. Whether in work, academics, sports, conversation, bible study, politics, or any area of life, we must strive to judge ourselves and others with an equal standard. This is a very difficult task. Our fallen human nature tends to give ourselves a lot of slack while viewing others with a very critical eye. We favor those who are kind to us, and disfavor those we don't like. We are quick to speak in negative terms or people who have offended us, while letting the same sorts of behaviors slide among others. In our marriages we consider our own blunders to be temporary lapses in judgment and unfortunate mistakes, while we perceive our spouses blunders as serious character flaws and moral failures. **Ha'Shem** requires us, as **a holy people**, to rise above the subjective, relativism of the human perspective, and deal with life objectively. We are to be fair and careful, because **the measure with which you measure out will be used to measure you (Matthew 7:2b).**[342]

Then **Chapter 19** closes with a general reminder for **the people of God** to **observe all of His statutes and ordinances, and do them; I am ADONAI (19:37).** The message of **Leviticus 19** is clear and practical. A summary could be worded this way: **God's people** must conform to **His** holiness by keeping **His mitzvot** (the letter of **the Torah**), by dealing with others in **love** (the spirit of **the Torah**), by living according to **His** standards of separation in **the world**, and by demonstrating kindness and justice to others.[343]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Your holiness** extends to everything that **You** do. There has never been, nor ever will there ever be, even the tiniest thought or action of **Yours** that is not totally **holy**. That means that when **You** guide me, all that **You** tell me to do, is for their best! **Your holy** standards are meant to bring overflowing joy and complete fullness to life!* ***I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10c)!***

*It is such a comfort to trust **You** with my **life**. **You** know exactly what will happen in the future. **You** may allow a trial so that I will grow stronger in **You**. **Trials have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Yeshua Messiah is revealed (First Peter 1:7).***

*As **Your** child, I **love You** and want to follow **You** in everything that I do. **Loving You** means that I want to obey all **You** say in **Your Word**. **You** are **the One** I long to please. So obeying **You** is not hard; rather obeying you is like doing what our new **Bridegroom** asks us to do. May my **life** be filled with **holy** thoughts, **holy** actions and **holy** plans that bring **You** much joy and pleasure. In **Your holy Yeshua's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*